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ABSTRACT

If educational administrators are to help others grow in positive ways they must master the principles of positive growth for their own lives. A positive view of self is learned through interaction with other people. It is important, therefore, that administrators develop positive personalities and become agents in organizations to help others develop open, trusting, positive personalities. Personal characteristics that help one to grow and to accept change as a satisfying challenge are listed and developed. (Author/MLF)

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OCCASIONAL PAPER NUMBER 2

THE POSITIVE VIEW OF SELF

by Donald Thomas

Our institutions must be become satisfying places to work and to learn. Especially in our schools, young people must come in contact with persons who have a positive view of themselves. Those who can help others to grow in positive ways are educational administrators.

If administrators are to do this job well, however, they must master the principles of positive growth for their own lives. Developing a positive view of self is not an easy task. It requires a great deal of personal effort and concentrated work. It is a task which is never complete. It is, as Abraham Maslow said, "a constant struggle to climb to the mountain top and touch fingers with God."

Positive people seem to be those who view change and adjustment as opportunities for renewal and for revitalizing their sense of well-being. Adequacy has been achieved through a series of successful experiences and positive relationships with others. They have developed an attitude toward problems as challenges to a strong self rather than a threat to a restricted self that cannot be trusted.

In contrast to the desire for constant renewal and acceptance of challenge, the inadequate person tends to hold a low estimate of his own ability to cope with problems and change. It usually comes out in self-describing ways: "I'm already too busy." "I don't have time." "If I had more help I could do it." "I work harder than anyone else." "I just can't do everything." Notice that each of these statements is a negative view of ones capacity to cope with whatever problem is at hand. "I am afraid of not being able to succeed" is restrictive and self-defeating.

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Positive people do not focus on their inadequacies. Such attention furthers the development of negative perceptions and feelings about self. Positive people concentrate on what they can do and center their attention on the task instead of the reasons why everything will fail.

Inadequate people seem to lose touch with their strengths and concentrate on their weaknesses. They seek to maintain a rigid, safe, self-image. These people, unfortunately, also lose touch with others and seem to work alone. They have doubts about themselves, about their value to the total organization. "I'm here to teach my students." "I was employed to help kids." "How can they expect so much from me?" These statements tend to isolate the individual from renewal and growth opportunities.

Persons who have a positive view of self focus on the mountain top and constantly recall the sights seen from above. They remember the satisfaction of achieving, of seeing the panoramic view, and of having peak experiences. These people see themselves as being liked, wanted, and valued. They like and value themselves. They have a tendency of seeing themselves as being "able to do."

Adequate persons can assess their strengths and weaknesses realistically and quickly. They contribute their strengths and then act to improve their weaknesses. Such people understand their feelings. They accept stress, anxiety, uncertainty, and doubt. They control such feelings instead of having the feelings control them. There is one common characteristic--they keep growing and reaching out for new and satisfying experiences. Such people are open, strong, positive, and happy.

Describing the positive person is much easier than helping others develop positive growth characteristics. Our challenge is not only to be positive ourselves, but to help others develop skills which lead to a positive life. What must an individual do to develop a positive view of self? Can such a view be learned?

A positive view of self is learned through interaction with other people. It is important, therefore, that administrators develop positive personalities and become agents in organizations to help others develop open, trusting, positive personalities.

Let me share with you what administrators must do, if they are to have strength and influence in assisting others to become positive and to continue to grow. Here are the personal characteristics that help one to grow and to accept change as a satisfying challenge:

1. The ability to understand that the human person has more powers and capabilities than he ever uses. Each of us is stronger, wiser, more able than we are at the present time. Our senses, our minds, our intellect, our wisdom can be developed more and more regardless of age. There is always more in reserve than ever appears in our conscious life. The human person has vast untapped resources. Our view should be that our talents and our strengths are there to be discovered and used.

   Call it the power of positive thinking. Call it yoga. Call it meditation. Call it spirituality. Call it whatever you wish. Each of us has more to give than we have ever given. Each of us has more strength, more skill, more wisdom, more power than anyone has ever asked of us. The sorrow of it all is that there are so few opportunities to tap the vast resources within us. Our regret is not that we are asked to give more, but that so few ever ask.

2. The ability to see the big picture. One can choose to live in a cave or to build a house with a view. We must develop a sense of wholeness with our total life (the sum total of our successes and failures) not just where are we today. We must have a perspective of all that we have done, not just what happened at 9:00 a.m. on Friday morning. All of us have accomplished much, have worked hard, have made a contribution, have tasted success--even when today is a total failure. We must judge ourselves with a sense of history and not by the present moment alone. Being in the cave one day does not mean that we are denied the sunshine, the stars, the achievements of previous days. We must have a wholeness of existence and not a fragmented view of daily tasks. The big picture tells us that we are worthy, that we are able, and that life is meaningful.

3. The ability to control time and to use it constructively. Each of us has twenty-four hours in any given day. There is absolute equity in the number of minutes each of us has in an hour. We cannot allow time to become the scapegoat for not doing what we want to do. The simple truth is that most of us spend a great deal of time in useless and unproductive ways. Many of us spend huge amounts of time complaining about not having enough time. Time controls us instead of being controlled by us. The skill of managing time can be learned, and it can provide us with all the time we need. It is amazing to discover that the less we complain about time the more of it we

seem to have. Personal growth gains in intensity and satisfaction when time is seen as our servant instead of as our master.

4. The ability to set goals and to achieve them. Every human activity is directed toward some goal. A goal is a destination. To arrive at that destination quickly, easily, and comfortably, it is necessary to know:

   a. Exactly where we're going
   b. The best way to get there, and
   c. How we will know when we are there.

   Most people have a sense of failure because they never arrive at destinations or don't know when they have arrived. Others fail to taste satisfaction because they don't know how to set goals or cannot identify ways of reaching them. There is no substitute for planning. The ability to establish goals, to determine ways of achieving them, and to know when they are achieved is basic to a positive life. It brings constant reinforcement and satisfaction. It intensifies ones desire to set additional goals and to reach them. Again, call it MBO, call it positive reinforcement, call it planned success, whatever you wish, achievement closure is something each of us controls and something that each of us can manage. Our alternative is a hopeless struggle with ambivalence, of never knowing where it is we are going and of not knowing when we are there.

5. The ability to negotiate with the circumstances of living and working. We cannot control all things, but we can negotiate most things. We can, as Satchel Paige once said, "jangle a little." Few things are as frustrating, as time consuming, as expensive, as depressing as trying to win an argument, as trying to get my way. The person intent on fighting for his point of view talks himself into an early grave. "My point of view" victories usually lead to heart attacks. Most negotiations usually lead to mutual need satisfaction and create conditions for positive growth. One must learn, however, to distinguish between principles and preferences. Negotiate preferences, but hold solid to principles. Be certain, however, that principles do not outnumber the preferences. If they do, frustration, anxiety, and stress are the inevitable results. The ability to negotiate requires trust, openness to alternatives, and a desire to solve the problems without winning at the expense of the other person. It requires that one is open to creative solutions and to change. One cannot negotiate with life if he is not willing to "jangle a little."

6. Ability to accept stress, pressure, and momentary insecurity. Stress, pressure and insecurity are a natural part of living. They are to be accepted and understood. Stress is a bodily reaction to fear or ambivalence. It produces certain bodily reactions. These reactions can be controlled once they are understood. Anxiety is a more generalized bodily reaction. It is more dangerous than stress. It, too, can be understood and controlled. Insecurity is related to our view of self. A positive view can control most feelings of insecurity. Stress, anxiety, and insecurity can be controlled by good health, a regular savings program for economic security, and a determined effort to continue to learn new skills. We must be determined to be healthy, to provide for family security, and to not become obsolete--to read, to study, to try new skills and to grow every day.

7. The ability to communicate with yourself and with others. Most of all this requires the ability to listen--to listen to ourselves and to others. We are in a constant dialogue with our inner self. The voice is always telling us what to do, what not to do, what to say, what to look for. The ability to understand our values, our motives, our biases, our pre-inclinations, our colorations helps us to listen to others more accurately and more honestly. Words of others must be free of our own values and our own experiences. They have their own colorations. Active listening requires that we try to hear through the experience and the values of those who are requesting our help. It is a difficult and demanding task. It requires a spirit of neutrality and an objectivity beyond normal types of relationships. It is an intense effort to identify with others, "to walk" as the Indian said "a mile in his moccasins." Communicating accurately is a difficult art. It requires the alertness and speed of a swordsman and the sensitivity of an artist. It requires a keen mind and a loving heart, perception and compassion, the ability to paint and to praise, as well as the ability to detect and direct.

8. The ability to motivate yourself into positive action. Without this, the others will be weak attempts at positive growth. We must motivate ourselves into positive action in becoming renewing persons. Self-motivation is a person's deliberate control over himself. It is self-direction, self-determination, self-control, self-mastery. It is the poem "Invictus." It is the springboard from which all other abilities emanate. It is not a spurt of activity. Rather, it is a positive attitude of doing

> what needs to be done as one wants it to be done. It is the process of becoming what one can be. It is basic to positive growth.

You and I have tremendous responsibilities. We have chosen to be in the helping professions because we believe that people can change, can achieve satisfaction, can continue to learn. What we believe, however, is not enough. We must be able to demonstrate the value of positive growth with our own lives. We must be exemplars to those we serve. We must demonstrate positive growth by growing in positive ways ourselves. Our words must be congruent with our actions. As we visit with others, we must be seen as a positive force for human growth and development. We must be seen as persons in constant struggle to reach the mountain top. In doing so we may influence others to do the same.